

The 30th Anniversary of the Religious Summit Meeting on Mt. Hiei
Kyoto, August 3rd and 4th, 2017

Greetings of the Community of Sant'Egidio

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Most. Ven. Morikawa, Eminences, Excellences, distinguished people, dear friends, I have the pleasure to give all of you the warmest greetings of the Community of Sant'Egidio for this important thirty anniversary.

As you know, people of our Community is deeply involved in the interreligious dialogue for peace and our people are very happy to know that also in Japan year by year another people go on the same path after Assisi meeting in 1986.

I would like to share with you a precious memory. About twenty-five years ago, I visited Mount Hiei and met Venerable Yamada Etai, who invited me for lunch at the monk community of Enriakuji. During lunch he told me: "Religions are lagging behind: the world is on the way of unity, politics understood that it is necessary to unifies peoples, the economic globalization is growing up etc. Also religions have to do their part and must develop cooperation between them".

Twenty-five years have already passed and many things changed. In the economic field, new forms of isolationism and protectionism are spreading. In Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Central Africa, the Philippines, North Korea and in many other places there are wars or conflicts. Terrorism brings violence also in peace areas etc. Pope Francis speaks of a Third World War in pieces.

I would like to remember only one victim of war: a friend of many of us, a friend that I met just here for the last time... At that time he told me: the road from my home to the airport is very dangerous, every day I don't know if I can come back safely. And he was kidnapped few months later: I'm speaking of Mar Gregorios Ibrahim, our friend from Aleppo, a very good man of peace that still we don't know if he will come back, among us, in our meetings. We hope and pray for him.

Why so many troubles today? Globalization made world smaller, Africa is closer to Europe, South America is closer to North America, Asian countries are closer each other, while shifts are faster and more frequent. Just these ones are the reasons why conflicts and wars increased. But politics and economics are not able to face these problems, in a sense politics and economics become problems themselves too. The prevail of the national interests or of those of large financial groups are not signs of

strength, but of weakness. Politics and economics have less capacity to govern world and the historical processes.

Anyway, despite these changes Yamada Etai's words are still right. The need of unity, mutual understanding, solidarity and friendship is in the heart of everybody more than thirty years ago. And if politics and economics are no longer able to unify the world, religions need to do their part more. If politics and economics are weaker, religion must become stronger. Religions don't have the power to force or bribe. They are a weak force, but they are also a great force. It's the strength we've experienced these days.

In conclusion, I would like to make just an example of what religions can do when they dialogue and collaborate. The Community of Sant'Egidio promoted the "humanitarian corridors" in collaboration with the Federation of the Evangelical Churches and the Tavola Valdese – it means with the Italian Christians that are not Catholics - in order to enter into Europe the refugees safely and securely. These refugees usually cross the Mediterranean on fragile boats, risking the shipwreck and meeting death. Thanks to this initiative of cooperation between different Christian denominations, now a part of those who flee from the terrible war in Syria can legally enter Europe. After Italy, humanitarian corridors will also be realized in France, Spain and other countries. The refugees are mostly Muslims helped and welcomed by Christians and not only by our organizations but also by common people, by families, by small villages or by little groups of people.

We must learn something new: we must learn to live together, we must learn the art of coexistence. As Andrea Riccardi, the founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio, said: religions can be guides for a new civilization that link all civilizations. And to reach this goal, they have to cooperate strictly, as Yamada Etai said many years ago.